



# **Guide to Medical Residency in the USA**

**U.S. Embassy-Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**



## Steps to a U.S. Medical Residency

In the United States, the residency is the essential final step in preparing physicians to practice medicine independently. Before undertaking the residency, U.S. students have completed undergraduate study, and then spent four more years in medical school to achieve the Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree, focusing on mastery of basic medical sciences and learning to apply that knowledge to clinical problems.

The residency, usually lasting three to seven years, builds on this experience. It allows participants to gain expertise in a medical specialty and to gradually take on increasing responsibility for patient care within a supervised clinical environment.

International medical graduates (IMGs) may gain particular benefit from a U.S. residency experience. Advanced medical technology and facilities, expert faculty, and the wide variety of educational programs available in the United States (approximately 8,000 educational programs in about 120 specialty and subspecialty areas are currently accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education), can make U.S. study an exciting opportunity.

IMGs should be aware that the route to residency is not easy and that openings tend to be highly competitive. Before beginning, it is important to realistically assess such areas as level of medical knowledge, English language skills, educational background, ability to obtain a visa for required testing and interviews in the United States, and goals as well as how closely they match home country needs (the ministry of health will be expected to support the final residency visa application).

The process involved in applying to a U.S. residency program as an IMG is not simple but it can be deciphered. The first essential is to obtain certification from the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Testing required for this certification may be begun while still in medical school, though the IMG must receive their final medical diploma and medical school transcript before being actually certified. Here are ECFMG's requirements:

Pass computer-based medical science examinations approved by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Currently the USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (Step 2 CK) are the only ECFMG-approved medical science examinations being administered. They are offered at Thomson Prometric testing centers worldwide. Note that exam format is changing somewhat over the next year as ECFMG moves from Thomson Prometric-developed test software to National Board of Medical Examiners software. (Web-based practice assessments similar in format to the new exam can be purchased at <http://www.nbme.org/sas>)

## Six Key Steps

1. **PASS THE USMLE.** Pass the hands-on USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills examination (Step 2 CS) examination to be administered by ECFMG in several U.S. locations (currently including Philadelphia, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston) throughout the year.

The USMLE Step 1 must be taken before Step 2 CS. Otherwise, the examinations may be taken in any order. All three must be passed within a seven-year period for the candidate to qualify for ECFMG certification.

No additional English proficiency examination is required for those taking Step 2 CS. (In the past, TOEFL was required.)

2. **GRADUATE FROM MEDICAL SCHOOL.** Graduate from a medical school listed in the International Medical Education Directory of the Foundation for Advocacy of International Medical Education and Research (available online at <http://imed.ecfm.org>)

Medical Programs that are recognized in Saudi Arabia (as of August 8, 2011)

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Batterjee Medical College for Sciences and Technology | Jeddah       |
| Global Medical College                                | Riyadh       |
| Jazan University                                      | Jazan        |
| King Abdulaziz University                             | Jeddah       |
| King Fahad Medical City                               | Riyadh       |
| King Faisal University                                | Al Khobar    |
| King Faisal University                                | Al-Ahsa      |
| King Khalid University                                | Abha         |
| King Saud University                                  | Riyadh       |
| King Saud University for Health Sciences              | Riyadh       |
| Qassim University                                     | Burayda      |
| Taibah University                                     | Al Munawarah |
| Umm Al Qura University                                | Mecca        |
| University of Dammam College of Medicine              | Dammam       |

3. **ECFMG CERTIFICATION.** Document the completion of all requirements for the receipt of the final medical diploma. Provide ECFMG with copies of the medical diploma and final medical school transcript. ECFMG will then independently verify these credentials with the medical school.
4. **RESEARCH SCHOOLS.** At the same time that IMGs are completing the ECFMG certification process, they can begin investigating residency options and applying to programs. IMGs must be ECFMG-certified before actually starting a residency.

Consult the Graduate Medical Education Directory, published by the American Medical Association (AMA) and/or the “FREIDA Online” database, on the AMA Web site at <http://www.ama-assn.org>, to choose appropriate programs.

Correspond with and, if possible, visit programs of interest.

5. **APPLICATION PROCESS.** Apply directly to programs of interest, using their application forms or the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS). ECFMG serves as the “designated dean’s office” for international medical graduates participating in ERAS—IMGs must have obtained an identification number exam through ECFMG (by applying for an exam) to apply through ERAS.

Also apply to be matched with programs of interest through the National Resident Matching Program (<http://www.nrmp.org>) or specialty matching programs (if programs participate).

6. **VISA.** Finally there is the visa application. IMGs must be ECFMG-certified and accepted to a residency before they can receive a visa for residency study.

Contact a designated sponsor (ECFMG for a J-1 visa) to obtain certification to apply for a visa. A curriculum vitae, letter from the home country ministry of health, and other materials will be required.

Once certification to apply is received, contact a U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for the visa. Be prepared to document study plans, financial resources sufficient for your planned program, and intent to return home.

## Medicine: Short-Term Options

The rule of "no patient contact without state licensure" can place limits on U.S. training options for international physicians. Yet many types of appropriate and potentially valuable programs do exist. These include such options as conferences reviewing the latest clinical developments; "observerships," "visiting clinician programs," or "preceptorships" that allow international professionals to make rounds, practice skills, and study cases with U.S. experts; and intensive hands-on training programs (in some cases designed specifically for an international audience) in areas such as epidemiology and public health.

Professionals may also be able to arrange observer-type programs by contacting health care institutions directly (try the director of the international liaison or the continuing education office, if any, or the head of the specialty area of interest). In the initial contact, potential participants should provide information on desired program dates, source of funding, and a curriculum vitae as well as a detailed explanation of what they hope to learn.

### Web Resources

[www.hon.ch/cgi-bin/conferences](http://www.hon.ch/cgi-bin/conferences), Health on the Net Foundation Conferences and Events, database of medical meetings worldwide.

[www.docguide.com/crc.nsf/web-bySpec](http://www.docguide.com/crc.nsf/web-bySpec), Doctor's Guide Congress Resource Centre, lists medical conferences by specialty, from AIDS to urology.

## Other Options in U.S. Medicine and Related Fields

Traditional graduate medical education may not be the best option for a particular student or the needs of a country's health care system. If foreign medical graduates are already experienced physicians or medical scholars, health care administrators, or medical school faculty members, they may want to consider alternative training opportunities in the United States. Many of these opportunities involve little or no direct patient care, and participation in them may not require certification by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG).

Foreign medical graduates who are interested in medical research or in teaching the basic medical sciences may want to consider getting a master's or doctoral degree in microbiology, anatomy, or a related science.

Information on regionally accredited university programs in such subjects can be found in directories of graduate education such as

20005; Telephone: (202) 842-4668) can provide a free booklet that has a those published by the Educational Testing Service and Peterson's Guides or by contacting the appropriate U.S. professional associations.

A master's degree in public health, health administration, or hospital administration may meet the needs of students whose career goals include policy-making or administrative aspects of health care. The Association of Schools of Public Health (1015 15th Street, NW, Suite 404, Washington, DC) great deal of information on the field of public health and on accredited graduate programs. The Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA) offers free information on accredited programs in the health care administration field and also publishes a biannual reference, *Health Administration Education*, which profiles accredited programs at the bachelor's and graduate levels as well as nontraditional and continuing education training. Their website is [www.aupha.org](http://www.aupha.org)

Other avenues of training are available to foreign physicians who are well respected in their field but who may need to expand their clinical knowledge or do scientific research in a specific area. Foreign physicians can obtain a J-1 visa without ECFMG certification to attend short-term, non-degree programs for the purpose of observation, consultation, teaching, or research. Any patient care involved in such training must be incidental to observation, consultation, teaching, or research activities and must be administered under the direct supervision of a licensed physician.

Foreign physicians have often found that these short-term, tailored programs are most relevant to their needs. However, such programs are usually arranged informally through direct personal contacts and information about them is hard to find.

In response to this problem, the FAIMER: Foundation for the Advancement of International Medical Education and Research was established in 2000. It provides short-term and intermediate-term training opportunities for foreign physicians and other health professionals who have demonstrated accomplishments in their fields. To apply to their programs, physicians must be sponsored by an organization, agency, or institution in their home country. ECFMG certification may be required for some programs. Contact the FAIMER, which administers this program, for more information.

## **Medical Student Exchange**

The difficulty of medical study in the United States is well known to the overseas educational adviser. The odds of acceptance are low, and for those accepted the costs are dauntingly high. While full-time medical study in the United States may not always be feasible for international students, the very real possibility of undertaking shorter term training in the U.S. medical education system should not be overlooked.

### **School Mobility**

In the third and fourth years of U.S. medical education, students shift out of traditional science classroom settings into a series of clinical training rotations called core clerkships and electives. Students spend between one and four months each in core clerkships in family practice, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, neurology, psychiatry, pediatrics, and surgery. In addition to completing these required clerkships, students also choose several electives that match their interests

and career goals. Electives may also be clerkships or may involve classroom-based instruction or other formats.

Medical students are highly mobile during this phase of their education. Most medical schools allow students to take a certain percentage of their electives through other institutions and therefore expect and are prepared to handle visiting student applications to clerkships throughout the year. This creates an ideal environment for a short-term international training experience, as it is possible to find clerkships that begin at any time of year in many medical fields.

This does not mean that there are clerkships for the asking, however. Students must recognize that the main barrier to international student access to a U.S. medical education—qualified U.S. citizens will generally be given preference for the limited spaces available at U.S. medical schools—also limits access to short-term study. Accredited U.S. medical schools are prohibited from compromising the educational opportunities of their own students. This means that visiting students are only admitted after the school's own students are taken care of. And if a medical school admits international students at all, it may be only after all qualified U.S. applicants have been placed.

Nevertheless, many international students apply and are accepted to U.S. clerkships each year. Elective clerkships offer better odds for acceptance than core clerkships, since schools are less willing and able to share their limited resources in the required core clerkship courses.

While there are some Internet resources that bring together clerkships in a specific field of medicine, many international students will find themselves browsing through university course catalogs in search of their ideal course. To help limit the scope of that search, students should determine the most important attributes that they want (location, cost, duration, subject area, course composition, and so forth) before they set out to search for suitable clerkships in the course catalogs of appropriate medical schools. A list of the 125 accredited medical schools in the United States can be found on the [Association of American Medical Colleges Web site](#).

Most schools have a clearly posted visiting student policy that will indicate whether foreign students are eligible to apply. Where this information is not clear, students should write to the school before beginning the application process.

## **The IFMSA**

The International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) organizes international medical exchange programs between member organizations in 85 countries around the world, including the United States. Students from countries that have bilateral contracts with IFMSA-USA are eligible to apply for a four-week clerkship in the United States at one of the following institutions: University of Illinois at Chicago, Thomas Jefferson Medical School (in Philadelphia, PA), the University of Massachusetts (Springfield, MA), and Michigan State University (College of Osteopathic Medicine, East Lansing, MI), among others. The number of slots available to students is determined by the exchange agreements drawn up between the two countries' student associations. These contracts are renewed each year. A list of IFMSA chapters, along with information on starting a new chapter and further exchange information can be found at the [IFMSA Web site](#).

# Useful Websites

Education Commission of Foreign Medical Graduates

<http://www.ecfmg.org>

Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research

<http://www.ecfmg.org/faimer/index.html>

International Medical Education Directory

<http://imed.ecfmg.org>

United States Medical Licensing Examination

<http://www.usmle.org>

NBME Self Assessment Program

<http://www.nbme.org/programs/sas/sas.asp>

American Medical Association

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama>

Graduate Medical Education Directory

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/education-careers/graduate-medical-education.page>

National Board of Medical Examiners Software

<http://www.nbme.org/sas>

National Resident Matching Program

<http://nrmp.org> and <http://www.savethematch.org>

Prometric – Information on test sites for the USMLE

<http://www.prometric.com/>

U.S. Embassy, Riyadh (for visa information and forms)

<http://riyadh.usembassy.gov>

# Advising Offices in Saudi Arabia

The Education Advising Offices at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates are certified EducationUSA advising centers affiliated with the United States Department of State. EducationUSA centers promote U.S. higher education around the world by offering accurate, comprehensive, objective and timely information about educational opportunities in the United States and guidance to qualified individuals on how to best access those opportunities.

Education Advising Offices do not endorse or rank any college or university, nor do they endorse services provided by companies or organizations in the areas of test preparation, admissions, placement, language training or visa procurement.

Basic services available from the Education Advising Offices include:

- College counseling and guidance
- Standardized test information (i.e. TOEFL iBT, SAT, etc.)
- Bulletins, handouts and education-related publications
- Study in the USA presentations
- Pre-departure orientations
- Authentication of diplomas and transcripts earned from institutions accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-approved accrediting organization
- Proctoring

For more information about Education Advising Offices affiliated with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, please see [www.educationUSA.state.gov](http://www.educationUSA.state.gov) and <http://exchanges.state.gov>. For the Middle East region, also visit [www.educationusa-mena.org](http://www.educationusa-mena.org).

## RIYADH

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PO Box 94310  
Riyadh 11693  
Tel: +966-1-488-3800 Ext. 4505 or Ext. 4207  
E-mail: [EduRiyadh@state.gov](mailto:EduRiyadh@state.gov)  
Website: <http://riyadh.usembassy.gov/saudi-arabia/resources.html>  
Hours: Saturday – Wednesday, 8:00am-5:00pm  
No walk-in services provided, by appointment only

## JEDDAH

Tel: +966-2-667-0080 Ext. 4151  
E-mail: [EduJeddah@state.gov](mailto:EduJeddah@state.gov)  
Website: <http://jeddah.usconsulate.gov/jeddah/advising.html>  
Hours: Saturday – Wednesday, 8:00am-5:00pm  
No walk-in services provided, by appointment only

## DHAHRAN

Tel: +966-3-330-3200 Ext. 3044  
E-mail: [EduDhahran@state.gov](mailto:EduDhahran@state.gov)  
Website: <http://dhahran.usconsulate.gov/dhahran/resources.html>  
Hours: Saturday – Wednesday, 8:00am-5:00pm  
No walk-in services provided, by appointment only



## **U.S. Embassy – Riyadh Consular Section**

### **Visa Advice for Students**

The United States welcomes thousands of bright and enthusiastic students from around the world each year. They are drawn to the cultural and academic diversity that exists in our colleges and universities, and they benefit from the challenging and innovative programs available at a range of schools. The U.S. Mission to Saudi Arabia is very glad to know that the U.S. continues to be the first choice for many Saudi students looking to study abroad. And, we know that the visa application process can sometimes seem overwhelming, especially when you are also applying to schools, for scholarships, and preparing to travel and live far from home.

It is very important to carefully plan and manage your visa application process to ensure you are prepared for your interview and have enough time before your intended departure date. Even if you have not received an I-20 and have no SEVIS receipt, you should still initiate these appointment procedures. If you do not have your SEVIS number at the time of filling out the online application form, you should enter in “N” followed by nine zeros (for example N000000000).

The following guidelines are intended to help you better understand and prepare for the visa application process so it goes as smoothly as possible. All of this information is also available on the Embassy’s website: <http://riyadh.usembassy.gov>. Please be sure to review the website information thoroughly and often.

### **7 Steps to Getting a Student Visa**

1. Get a visa photo (5cm x 5cm; white background)
2. Complete the online DS-160 application at <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv>
3. Schedule an appointment with Visapoint at <https://ksa.us-visaservices.com>
4. Obtain your I-20 with your admission to your program of study
5. Pay the visa application fees at SAMBA
6. Go for the interview at the U.S. Embassy/U.S. Consulate
7. Additional Processing

## **Visa Tips**

### **1. Schedule an interview at least three months or more before you plan to depart.**

It can take several months to receive a visa. Student visas for Saudi Arabian students now have a validity of 5 years. We recommend you apply early. The consular section recommends that you apply between 3 and 4 months before you plan on studying in the United States.

### **2. Come prepared for the interview.**

Many visas are delayed when students do not bring the proper required documentation. To avoid this, make sure you bring the required documents. They are:

#### **Application Package:**

- Passport valid for at least 6 months
- Confirmation page from the DS-160
- I-20 front page copy
- SAMBA receipt

#### **Supporting Documents:**

- 5x5 cm photo (white background, showing hairline, NOT altered in anyway)
- Old passports
- Scholarship letter or bank documents
- School transcripts
- SEVIS Receipt – payable at <http://www.fmjfee.com>

### **3. Don't stress about the interview**

During the interview, the consul is interested to know things about your background, like why you want to travel to the U.S., and what your goals are. Many of the Embassy's consular officers speak Arabic and there is always an Arabic-speaking translator available if you need one in the interview. Over 95% of Saudi student visa applications are approved.

### **4. For English Language Students.**

If you are going to study at an English Language Program, it is helpful to request the school to write in multiple start dates in the 'remarks' section of the I-20 form, #9. This enables students to cross the border if their visa arrives after their I-20 start date in Section #5 has passed. A letter from the school with multiple start dates will also work.

### **5. Expect delays**

It is not uncommon for visas to take up to three months to process. While the embassy will work to process your visa as fast as possible, some delays cannot be avoided. At the end of the interview the officer will tell you the estimated time required for processing, but this is only an estimate, and processing times may vary. Student visas cannot be expedited, so the only way to make sure the visa comes on time is to apply well in advance.